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Rangeland Management Problems Associated with Wildlife from a Rangeman's Viewpoint

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OPENING COMMENTS

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Rangeland is the largest renewable 'natural resource of the Great Plains states. It supplies forage for the livestock industry (together with tame pasture), habitat for wildlife, water for man and animals, beauty and pleasure for everyone and an economic base for many rural communities. In short, it is many things to many people.

I want to impress upon you the magnitude and importance of rangeland to the Great Plains States. Even though wildlife is the major emphasis of most of you I would submit that rangeland is or should be a major concern also. Rangeland makes up 53.7% of the Great Plains Agricultural land (Table 1). Privately owned rangeland in the Great Plains in 77% of that in the U.S. or 43% of all rangeland (including Federal land). Of major significance, 8 of the top 10 states in acres of privately owned rangeland are in the Great Plains. In total rangeland 5 of the top 10 states are in the Great Plains. Rangeland in the 10 Great Plains is extremely important since 83% of it is privately owned and supports the largest economic agricultural enterprise, the livestock industry. It also has the potential for another high economic enterprise, that of wildlife and reareation.

Today, we will look at some of the problems in rangeland management associated with wildlife.

Table 1. Rangeland in the Great Plains by ownership, percent of agricultural lands and national ranking

State	Privately Owned			All Rangeland			Total Land
	1000 acres	National Rank	% of Ag. land	1000 acres	National Rank	% of Ag. land	1000 acres
Colorado	19,137	8	30.7	27,822	10	44.7	62,273
Kansas	16,055	10	32.9	16,278	15	33.4	48,779
Montana	42,339	2	45.6	53,334	4	57.4	92,896
Nebraska	23,821	6	49.4	24,274	11	50.3	48,262
New Mexico	33,614	3	48.6	48,726	5	70.4	69,189
North Dakota	10,842	13	26.4	12,296	16	30.0	41,054
Oklahoma	9,107	11	25.0	9,301	17	25.5	36,452
South Dakota	21,775	7	47.7	23,393	13	51.2	45,696
Texas	90,285	1	58.4	91,599	2	59.2	154,621
Wyoming	26,472	4	43.8	46,896	6	77.6	60,408
TOTALS	293,448	--	44.5	353,919	--	53.7	659,630

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED
WITH WILDLIFE FROM A RANGEMAN'S VIEWPOINT

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My comments here will be to try to bring together **common areas** of concern I have picked out of the papers given here today. I feel **several** of the papers have touched on problems **basic** to both. range and wildlife management. Also, some of the problems touched on deal with the same forces and factions common to many controversies today.

One underlying factor has come through to me this afternoon. **It** is best described by what I call "The one 'study' good forever" syndrome. These early studies, whether in range or wildlife management, are rarely questioned or criticized in public no matter how far they are from reality today. Many of these early efforts were magnificent attempts to put on paper what was observed by individuals. As time passed and others added information, these original "studies" should have assumed their proper place; the **beginning**. But in some cases these "studies" remain as basic facts and can and still prevent our fully understanding the biological processes. One example of such problems is the relationships between man, animals and vegetation **before** the whiteman. We can never know what the exact relationships were. Early records rarely were made by fully qualified observers nor were they complete **enough** to give the full picture. Also, we know that the Great Plains ecosystem, like all ecosystems, has been and always will be a dynamic, everchanging system. Even if the **whiteman** had not settled for another 100 years, the **balance** and relationships would have changed.

Man, as an organism, has, of course, played a major role in the Great Plains ecosystem. He is the only organism which can and does "manage" his ecosystem (habitat). As such, understanding the habitat requirements for each species and the relationships between species is necessary to bring about **a** balance for today's needs. Management of the total ecosystem should be the main concern in handling problems from wildlife damage in rangeland management. Utilizing such factors as competition between species, whether domestic or wild, physical factors and space considerations can be of use.

Yet overall, we still do not have good, strong documentation of the effect of species such as the prairie dog. We need to document, both to justify control and to understand the management needed to restore the range resources, what the actual losses are, the species changes, the forage competition, forage quality, effects on soil factors, and the resulting livestock performance. This documentation ultimately must be done in studies carefully planned, executed and interpreted by interdisciplinary teams to fully define the situation. These studies must strive to not only document the problems created, but also to fully document beneficial effects and ultimately access a risk-benefit **ratio**. This type of documentation will be tedious, complex and time and money consuming. Until we have this type of research, we must continue to use the best available data and our best interpretation and application of that data.

Another area of joint concern is the effects of regulations, emotions and politics. I feel we as professionals are not guilt-free in this area. We ourselves tend to become biased just like those we oppose. Our biases then taint our professional judgement. I know this is a **contuining** problem for myself and many others. But we must continually strive to be as fair and impartial as possible. Understanding the "other sides" point of view as well as being current on the data available is a part of this process. Two somewhat related issues may serve as examples of the importance of basing decisions on solid facts. Registration of toxicants and the protection/of endangered species are definitely emotional subjects and many of the decisions made are influenced by pressure groups with narrow goals or objectives. In the first instance, concern for the enviroment, hazards to non-target species, effect on man and other such topics are of major concern and **rightfully** so.. But the decisions must be made based on facts and not on emotions resulting from fear, ignorance and half-truths. When decisions must be made on less than complete data; they must be reviewed as new data becomes available. Many of the issues we face have the potential to limit our alternatives for management. Unless this trend is reversed, the role of creative management, even on private lands, will be a thing of the past. In the meantime management methods and practices must be developed with imagination and understanding which are both economical and practical. This is not a good alternative to sound judgement but is a must under the circumstances.

This leads to **another point** I want to make. Controlling a problem species is only the beginning of obtaining complete control. In nearly all cases, the problem species, whether animal or plant, has changed the ecosystem balance. The removal of an organism from an ecosystem creates an imbalance. Unless management adjustments are made, the resulting changes can be as bad or worse then before. Management must consider vegetation, livestock, wildlife and all other factors to achieve the desired ecosystem balance.

Ultimately, because each of us specialize in a part of the management of the Great Plains greatest renewable resource, we must strive to be able to communicate effectively with each other, strive for multiple use in its fullest context, strive to understand the basic management principles of each other's discipline, and strive to understand the basic goals of each other's disciplines. I pledge to do what I can to make the multiple use of rangelands with full use and management alternatives available for use. I hope we can accomplish this together.